



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Billings Field Office
5001 Southgate Drive, PO Box 36800
Billings, Montana 59107-6800



IN REPLY TO:
4700

January, 2006

Dear Interested Party:

We have received your letter requesting information about the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range (PMWHR). Thank you for your interest in management of this unique wild horse herd and area.

As an interagency group, the BLM, Custer National Forest, and the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area (NPS) have recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding to establish mutual goals and objectives relating to the management of the PMWHR. All land ownership agencies have agreed that the primary goal with respect to management of the PMWHR is:

"Wild horses are to be managed as free-roaming, self-sustaining populations of healthy animals in a manner that is designed to achieve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance in keeping with the multiple use management concept for public lands."

Since 2000, many individuals and organizations have made substantial requests for a variety of issues to be considered within the PMWHR herd plan revision. Issues include maintaining designated boundaries while maintaining or reducing herd size; periodic wild horse introductions for genetic conservation; range expansion to allow for an increased herd size to improve genetic viability and to mitigate horse grazing impacts; the development of additional population control methods; and a variety of rangeland improvement practices.

Decision-makers and staff from all three agencies regularly meet to discuss rangeland condition and herd management needs. In the short-term, interagency activities will be proposed to help improve wild horse herd numbers and distribution through the use of additional fertility control, possible gather activity, water catchment repairs and prescribed burning for range improvement. Environmental Assessments regarding some and/or all of these activities are expected to be released for public review and input in 2006.

The NPS have recently responded to the BLM in terms of additional NPS land availability for the wild horses within the PMWHR. They have indicated that the east Trail Creek pasture may be considered for temporary winter use by wild horses while designated lands are undergoing range improvement projects. Due to funding restrictions, no range improvement projects have been scheduled by the BLM for this part of the range in 2006, but future efforts are being considered.

As an interagency group, we continue to discuss many issues related to the long-term goal of managing for a healthy herd on healthy rangeland. All of these issues will be addressed by a revision of the PMWHR herd plan concurrently with the revision of the land use plans (LUP) for the Custer National Forest and the BLM Billings Field Office beginning in 2007-2008.

BLM, as the lead agency for the PMWHR, is maintaining a mailing list of all interested parties. You are currently on this mailing list which will be used for any releases of documents (including environmental assessments) for public review pertaining to activities on the PMWHR. If you have further comment or question, please feel free to contact the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, Linda Coates Markle, Billings Field Office at 406-896-5013.

Sincerely,

Sandra S Brooks
Field Manager